

How lsd is depicted in terry gilliam's fear and loathing in las vegas



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Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is a movie infamous for its depiction of various types of drug use, particularly concerning Psychedelics. The plot is driven by journalist Raoul Duke and his lawyer Dr. Gonzo on their drug fueled trip to cover stories in Las Vegas. The film depicts various drugs such as Mescaline, LSD, Ether, Marijuana, and a myriad of other substances, but this paper will focus mostly on its depiction of LSD.

Early on in the film, Duke is shown taking several tabs of LSD in the form of blotter paper, and then proceeds to ask how long he has until it kicks in. Gonzo tells him he doesn't have long and that he would have to speed in order for them to get to Vegas before the drugs kick in. Just over a half an hour later, the effects begin to take hold. The Valet's face starts shifting and moving as he asks him questions and Duke can no longer keep his composure as well as he could before. When he enters the building, He appears to be a sweaty mess, blaming the heat of Las Vegas. Once he tries to speak to a woman behind the reception counter for a press pass and a room, he can hardly keep his composure at her questions, he has virtually no ability to say what he wants to say in a normal fashion, and, like the Valet's face before, everything is shifting and "breathing", particularly patterns on things like rugs and wallpaper, and people's faces. Soon after, he can no longer control himself as everyone in the building appears to become lizard people, and he begins to panic and not be able to keep his voice down when speaking to Gonzo, drawing a lot of attention to himself, and afterwards he is brought to his hotel room and is hiding behind furniture and overall acting very paranoid.

Now, the time it takes for the subjective effects to happen are typically 20-60 minutes after oral consumption and spreading into the bloodstream and across the blood brain barrier, and lasting 8-12 hours (Maisto, Galizio, and Connors 297-8). This makes the time frame in which the LSD activates and lasts accurate, as it is implied to have started acting on Duke within an hour and lasted until the next morning, where he says he didn't sleep, meaning from consumption (less than an hour before sundown) to the next morning (give or take 12 hours), matching the route of administration and length of effects. The physiological effects of LSD are generally similar to that of Stimulants such as Amphetamines and Cocaine (Maisto, Galizio, and Connors 299). This would make LSD sympathomimetic, and leads to effects such as increased heart rate, high blood pressure, dilated pupils, high body temperature, and sweating. This is shown when Duke is sweating heavily before he gets to the reception at the hotel, blaming the hot Vegas weather, when in reality it's the large amount of LSD he took making these effects happen.

As for the vivid changes in what he was seeing, such as the lights blaring, colors showing up, patterns and objects "breathing" and faces shifting, etc. The reasons for this are hard to pinpoint exactly, however, it is believed that since hallucinogens in the same class as LSD (Serotonergic Hallucinogens) all bind to the 5-HT_{2A} Receptors that they have much to do with the effects drugs like LSD have on mood and perceptions, behaving similarly to Serotonin (Maisto, Galizio, and Connors 297). It is also a known agonist of these receptors. However, since other drugs that affect serotonin also don't cause hallucinations (Such as MDMA, another type of Hallucinogen, or

SSRIs), it is still up for debate what truly makes these hallucinations happen. However, Duke's strange mood and visual hallucinations are relatively accurate, given the way the drugs are reported to work (Maisto, Galizio, and Connors 299).

Something Duke and Gonzo both experienced were some of the adverse effects of the drugs. Particularly panic in Duke's case and Psychosis in Gonzo's. This is seen when Duke can't compose himself in any way socially, freaking out when people question him or look at him. His paranoia and panic attacks are a known issue regarding LSD, particularly in the 1960's when there were walk in crisis centers dedicated to calming people with these effects down (Maisto, Galizio, and Connors 300). In Gonzo's case, however, he becomes absolutely psychotic when on LSD and other Hallucinogens in the same class in the film. Every time he uses hallucinogens in the film he ends up threatening to kill people and himself. He becomes dangerous to himself and others, despite the fact that he seems relatively well adjusted when sober. This shows the idea that LSD brings out psychosis in some people. It is unknown whether LSD creates a state of psychosis in these people or if there were already latent problems in them and the LSD just magnifies it. The conclusion is hard to find here, since evidence is hard to find because psychotic users of LSD tend to use other, harder drugs as well, and because we don't entirely understand LSDs effects, but it is generally agreed that it can bring psychosis out in disturbed or emotionally vulnerable individuals, and in Gonzo, this manifests itself in his threatening of various bystanders and acting like a lunatic (Maisto, Galizio, and Connors 302)

In conclusion, the effects of LSD in the movie are almost spot on to what studies have shown about LSD, from the physical effects to the psychological effects down to the adverse effects, almost everything that happens in the movie is accurate to what would happen according to the studies shown. The only problem here, however, is that LSD isn't an incredibly well documented drug, with hallucinogens in general being a sort of enigmatic branch of substances. This, along with the fact that, as of now, it is generally accepted that LSD has widely ranging effects depending on the individual, means that virtually anything, particularly when it comes to visual hallucinations, can be a justified and "correct" depiction of LSD (for example we know the effects that it has on Serotonin and that this may be the reason for visual hallucination, but the exact reasons why and the extent of the hallucinations are unknown from a physiological standpoint). However, as of now, the representation of LSD is almost perfect in relation to how it is shown to act in studies.